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291536Z Jun 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002924

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI AND NEA/PI; CAIRO FOR PDAS CHENEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [KMPI](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: KUWAITIS STILL CELEBRATING WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND
GOK APPOINTMENTS; PDAS CHENEY MEETS SOME OF THE REVELERS

REF: A. KUWAIT 2900

[B](#). KUWAIT 2869

[C](#). KUWAIT 2212

[1](#)1. (U) More than one month after the historic decision granting women full political rights and the subsequent GOK appointment of one woman to the Council of Ministers and two women to the Municipal Council, Kuwaitis continue to celebrate the achievements with receptions, symposia, and other almost weekly events. In the past week, Emboffs attended a reception in honor of Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak and a gala hosted by a consortium of educational and human rights organizations. A recurring theme at the events, which brought together Sunni and Shi'a, men and women, and the veiled and unveiled, was the need for civic education to encourage women to take full advantage of their new rights. NEA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Cheney, who visited Kuwait June 24-25, participated in three civil society events during which she congratulated women on their recent political victories and restated U.S. support for Kuwait's political transformation and offered training if desired.

Lunch at the Dashti's

[1](#)2. (U) Leading women's activist Dr. Rola Dashti, who is already planning her campaign for a 2007 parliamentary seat, hosted PDAS Cheney and a group of 20 women for lunch at her home in Surra. Cheney expressed admiration for the Kuwaiti women who waged a long campaign for their political rights and also fielded questions from local media on a variety of topics from political reform in Kuwait to the Iranian presidential elections. Cheney engaged a group of women ranging from fully-covered Shi'a Khadija Al-Mahmaid, a PhD candidate who spoke of her own intentions to run for Parliament, to the unveiled international law expert, Dr. Badria Al-Awadi, in a discussion of next steps for Kuwaiti women. The group had conflicting views on whether women would actually vote for female candidates. They spoke of the need to engage the large number of politically apathetic women, especially those outside the capital, whose votes may go to Islamist candidates likely to rely on spousal pressure to influence women's electoral decisions. They also addressed the need for electoral redistricting to limit vote-buying. All welcomed training and assistance from the U.S. and many spoke highly of the MEPI-funded campaign training workshop administered by NDI in March and April.

Women Praise U.S. Support, Cold to Election Monitors

[1](#)3. (U) PDAS Cheney told a group of approximately 30 women at the Women's Cultural and Social Society that the U.S. is looking at ways to support women's full political participation by offering candidate training, polling assistance and seminars allowing politically active women from around the region to share their experiences. She then opened the floor to Q&A. Participants thanked the U.S. for its unwavering support leading up to the May 16 vote, and several attendees repeated the refrain calling for increased political awareness among marginalized women.

[1](#)4. (U) When asked what role the U.S. would play in the 2007 elections, PDAS Cheney explained that the U.S. could assist in voter education activities through MEPI, provide training to Kuwaiti organizations to poll watch or organize international observers were Kuwait to request them, a comment not well received by some participants. One woman predicted the presence of international observers "would bring chaos," adding that "Kuwait is different" and unlike Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, countries hosting observers in recent elections. The media ran several stories based on the misinterpretation of the comment (ref A).

[1](#)5. (U) Cardiologist to the Prime Minister Dr. Farida Al-Habib, who made clear her opposition to election observers, nevertheless responded in an Arabic daily to attacks by National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi on the

election observer comment. Al-Habib clarified that the PDAS offered the international observers, which would not include Americans, as one of many options available to Kuwait to assist with the 2007 elections. Al-Khorafi had stated publicly that PDAS' remark was an insult to a country with the oldest working parliament in the Gulf.

Students Call for More Exchange Programs

16. (U) PDAS Cheney also meet with a group of young people from the Kuwait Economic Society and 15 high school students active in the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) exchange program for high school juniors. All spoke positively of their experiences in the U.S., argued that continued exposure to U.S. values and practices would promote greater economic and political reform in Kuwait, and recommended the establishment of short-term summer exchange programs for youth from more conservative families whose parents would likely object to an entire year abroad. PDAS Cheney emphasized that the U.S. remains open to visitors and praised the students for helping to bridge the gaps between the U.S. and the Middle East.

17. (U) PDAS Cheney did not clear this message.

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